

# Automobile Safety

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## Protect Your Wheels

One vehicle is stolen every 21 seconds in the United States. Stolen cars, vans, trucks, and motorcycles cost victims time and money - and increase everyone's insurance premiums. They're also often used to commit other crimes.

## The Basic Prevention Policy

Never leave your car running or the keys in the ignition when you're away from it, even for "just a minute".

Always roll up the windows and lock the car, even if it's in front of your home.

Never leave valuables in plain view, even if your car is locked. Put them in the trunk or at least out of sight. Buy radios, tape and CD players that can be removed and locked in the trunk.

Carry the registration and insurance card with you. Don't leave personal identification documents or credit cards in your vehicle.

When you pay to park in a lot or garage, leave just the ignition key with the attendant. Make sure no personal information is attached. Do the same when you take your car for repairs.

## Add Extra Protection

Etch the Vehicle Identification Number (VIN) on the windows, doors, fenders, and trunk lid. This helps discourage professional thieves who have to either remove or replace etched parts before selling the car. Copy the VIN and your tag number on a card and keep it in a safe place. If your vehicle is stolen, the police need this information.

Install a mechanical locking device - commonly called clubs, collars, or j-bars - that locks to the steering wheel, column, or brake to prevent the wheel from being turned more than a few degrees.

Investigate security systems if you live in a high-theft area or drive an automobile that's an attractive target for thieves. You may get a discount on your auto insurance.

Join the national Watch Your Car Auto Theft Prevention program where you voluntarily register your car with the police; this allows the police to stop the car during certain hours when you normally would not be driving (1 a.m. to 5 a.m.). All participants display decals in a designated area on their vehicles.

## What About Carjacking?

Carjacking - stealing a car by force - has captured headlines in the last few years. Statistically, your chances of being a carjacking victim are very slim and preventative actions can reduce the risk even more.

Approach your car with the key in hand. Look around and inside before getting in.

When driving, keep your car doors locked and windows rolled up at all times.

Be especially alert at intersections, gas stations, ATMs, shopping malls, convenience and grocery stores - all are windows of opportunity for carjackers.

Park in well-lighted areas with good visibility, close to walkways, stores, and people.

If the carjacker has a weapon, give up the car with no questions asked. Your life is worth more than a car.

## Beware of the "Bump and Rob"

It works like this. A car, usually with a driver and at least one passenger, rear-ends or "bumps" you in traffic. You get out checking the damage. The driver or one of the passengers jumps in your car and drives off.

If you're bumped by another car, look around before you get out. Make sure there are other cars around, check out the car that's rear-ended you and who's in it. If the situation makes you uneasy, stay in the car and insist on moving to a police station or busy, well-lighted area to exchange information.

## Be on the Lookout

If your car's stolen, report it to the police immediately. Also, report abandoned cars to the local agency that handles their removal.

When buying a used car from an individual or a dealer, make sure you have the proper titles, that the VIN number is intact, and the "federal sticker" is on the inside of the driver's door. That sticker should match the VIN.

Suggest that any dealer, rental car agency, or auto repair shop you use offer auto theft prevention information in the waiting rooms.

If joy riding is a problem in your community, work to improve recreational programs and job opportunities for young people.